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Although the *ombiasy mpeikidy* may perform certain functions in connection with the cult of the dead, their main activities are in connection with divination, the manufacture of charms, etc. While the priests direct their activities toward placating and controlling Beings, whether Deities or ghosts, the *ombiasy mpeikidy* specialize in forecasting and controlling the operations of Fate. Even when they are in close touch with spirits, they do not control their ghostly advisers, but simply act as their mouthpieces. The controls rarely demand anything for themselves. They simply know what will happen and tell the *ombiasy*.

Ombiasy mpeikidy are divided into *ombiasy ndolo* and *ombiasy nkazo*. The two groups perform identical functions, but derive their magical abilities from different sources.

Ombiasy ndolo (lit. "spirit *ombiasy*") are under the control of some individual ghost, although it seems that a few may have more than one ghostly adviser. The ghost is usually that of an ancestor, commonly one who has himself been an *ombiasy*. The spirit selects the person and notifies him that he has been chosen by a dream or vision. If the person is reluctant to accept the appointment, which is not infrequent, the ghost may desist. However, if it appears a second time and repeats the demand, the person must obey, on pain of death. Apparently the ghost visits the *ombiasy* at will and is dominating rather than dominated. At first it makes its will known through dreams, later, as the *ombiasy* becomes more accustomed to it, it will speak to him while he is awake and engaged in ordinary activities. Apparently some practitioners of this class do have auditory hallucinations and are convinced of the genuineness of the control. The spirits will often notify them in advance when their services will be required, so that they will have the medicine or the charm ready when the person comes to ask for it. They cure the sick, make charms, direct ceremonies, etc., like other *ombiasy*, but most of them do not use mechanical means of divination, relying on their controls for information. Although most of them are considered slightly inferior to the *ombiasy nkazo*, exceptional ones are accorded the highest rank of all by the natives.

Ombiasy nkazo (lit. "wood *ombiasy*") are far more numerous than all the others put together. They do not claim spirit control and, while the others are often nervously or mentally abnormal, they are, with few exceptions, thoroughly normal and above the average in mentality. All those with whom I became personally acquainted showed an unusual degree of shrewdness and common sense and had

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787 825 If a hen lays a very small egg, or eats its eggs, or crows, it is a sign of danger, sickness or death in the family.

After the *kovoy* ("guard an charm") was set up at Ambohimanga, if a single crow flew over the village it was a sign that enemy scouts were near. If there were two or more crows, the enemy was at a distance and would not arrive. If a wild boar or lemur came to the village of its own accord, it was a sign of great and imminent danger. This only happened once, in the time of Queen Iovana, and an ox was sacrificed to the ancestors at once to avert the evil.

DREAMS

787 The significance attached to dreams of ancestors has already been discussed. Other dreams were interpreted as actual experiences of the *ambiroo* and were not considered ominous. I could learn of no instances of dream interpretation.

INSANITY AND SPIRIT POSSESSION

828 158 There is a very sharp distinction in the native mind between spirit possession and insanity. The latter is believed to be due to the absence of the normal personality, equated with the soul. Although the insane are usually well treated, they receive no special respect and are not thought to be under spirit protection. Formerly those who were violent or otherwise troublesome, or who appeared to be suffering, were put to death as painlessly as possible. This was considered a merciful act. At the present time even the more conservative tribes usually send their insane to be cared for by the government.

787 158 All the Malagasy believe in spirit possession, but its importance in the culture pattern varies considerably with the tribe. The idea appears to be most developed among the Sakalava, on the west coast, moderately strong among the plateau tribes, and weak among those of the southeast coast. The Antaifasina, who belong to the last-named group, insisted that they were unfamiliar with it prior to about 1910, when it was introduced by tribesmen who had worked on west coast plantations. Some of these men became possessed by Sakalava spirits, who returned with them. Even now, many of the Antaifasina claim to be possessed by the souls of Sakalava chiefs and speak Sakalava during their seizures. In view of the unquestionable antiquity of spirit possession among the other east coast tribes, it seems probable that the idea was already present, but received a great impetus from the Sakalava contact. It could not have been

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very strong, however, for the Antaifasina say that they are unable to cure the malady and are accustomed to turn over the victims to the French medical authorities for treatment. 787 158

The ceremonial side of spirit possession is most highly developed among those tribes which show the most African influence and it seems possible that the whole idea is ultimately traceable to Africa. However, it has become thoroughly incorporated into the native culture. I never heard a non-Christian native express scepticism regarding it and even the Christians are convinced of its reality and treat it by prayer and exorcism. [174]

Spirit possession is always intermittent. Physically it is characterized by trembling and twitching, increasing in violence until the subject begins to dance. The attack usually ends in unconsciousness and rigidity. When the subject is revived he is normal and has no memory of what has occurred. A few of the victims may be true epileptics, but in most cases they seem to suffer from nothing more than acute hysteria. A Tanala woman of the Manandriana gens told me that she might become possessed at any time or place. Her heart would begin to beat violently and everything before her eyes would become wavering and indistinct "as though she were looking through heat waves in strong sunlight." When this happened she knew that the possessing spirit was coming and would begin to dance. She had never seen or heard the spirit and this was the only way in which she was conscious of its presence. Ratzakoba, a Tanala informant of the Zafindiamanana gens, told me that a person subject to possession would begin to tremble and twitch when he heard a drum, or a person crying, or when he felt any strong emotion, as joy at the return of a long-absent relative. All informants agreed that the malady was contagious and that if one person became possessed all those present who were subject to possession would also be attacked. I witnessed a case of this sort during a ceremony at the royal Sakalava tombs at the village of Mahabo. A woman became possessed and a man near her was seized almost immediately. As he was a person of importance all attention was centered on him and the woman recovered in a few minutes without help. Among the Imerina there was a great epidemic of possession in 1863–64, which seems to have been quite comparable to some episodes in medieval European history. [164]

Satisfactory accounts of spirit possession and the methods for its cure were obtained from the Zafindiamanana and Manandriana gentes of the Tanala Menabe. It is known to occur with at least equal frequency among the Ikongo, but no exact information was 158 828

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available. It seems to play a relatively unimportant role in the culture of the Menabe and the native attitude toward it is much the same as that toward any other disease. Although the possessed receive much care and attention during the seizure, to be subject to possession decreases rather than increases the prestige of the individual. Even persons who give oracles while possessed are, with few exceptions, rated below the regular *ombiasy* ("medicine-men"). All informants agreed that a person who was not subject to possession would make no attempt to become so.

There can be little doubt that spirit possession is becoming more frequent at the present time. This is probably due in part to increased contact with tribes who hold the concept. Thus Raindranaivo, my best informant from the Manandriana gens, says that the ceremonial features of possession have been taken over by his gens from the Betsileo, some of whom now live among them, and that the frequency of possession has greatly increased within his adult memory, about fifty years. Emotional stresses resulting from the break-up of the old culture may also play a part, for the epidemic outbreaks of possession among the Imerina occurred at the time when European culture began to make itself felt as a menace.

In both gentes the term *salamanga* is applied indiscriminately to the malady, the spirit causing it, the person suffering from it (during the time he is possessed), and the ceremony for its cure. The Zafindramanana recognize two types of *salamanga*, the ordinary one and the *salamanga sakalava*, in which the possessed gives spirit messages, directions for making medicines, etc., during the seizure.

There seems to be a good deal of confusion about the spirits causing the ordinary *salamanga*. In general they are regarded as ancestral, but there seems to be no complete agreement on this, or as to whether more than one spirit can possess the same individual at different times. The ordinary *salamanga* usually does not know who his possessing spirit is. He is seized without warning and will drop whatever he is doing and run toward the village tomb or to some near-by lake or river, where he plunges in. His relatives pursue him and carry him back to the village bodily. Once there, he is released and begins to dance. If the bystanders do not sing and clap, to help him, he falls unconscious and becomes rigid, as though dead. After the victim has danced for a time and begins to show signs of exhaustion, one of his relatives takes the *hasomanga* (see p. 187), scrapes it with the regular invocation, and puts the dust in water. The victim drinks some of this and pours the rest over his head. He recovers

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at once. The Zafindiamanana have no charms to prevent possession and say that no permanent cure is possible. 158 787

The *salamanga sakalava* is always possessed by a known ancestral spirit. In many cases he is a regular practitioner who can throw himself into the *salamanga* state at will. The Zafindiamanana seem to use the terms *salamanga sakalava* and *ombiasy ndolo* as synonymous, although in other gentes the latter term has a different significance (see *Ombiasy*). However, they rate such persons below the regular *ombiasy* and say that the profession is dangerous, often leading to insanity. 756 829

The *salamanga sakalava* seems to occupy himself mainly with curing diseases. The situation is explained to him before the seizure comes on. During the attack he behaves like the ordinary *salamanga*, but if he runs to water at the onset of the possession he will dive to the bottom and bring up something from it. This will be the medicine for the malady. After he has been brought back, and while he is dancing, his spirit will answer questions or declare the cause and cure of the sickness. Finally, he is cured with *hazomanga* water, like the regular *salamanga*. 756

Among the Manandriana the ideas and practices connected with the *salamanga* are much more elaborate. They call the ordinary *salamanga* (without messages) *bilo*. It manifests itself by violent twitchings and a compulsion to dance. It may attack people while they are asleep or seriously ill in bed. It may also be brought on by eating the first of the new rice or maize at harvest time. Sometimes, apparently, the *ombiasy* diagnoses an illness as *bilo* when the ordinary symptoms are lacking. When the attack commences the *ombiasy* ("medicine-man") employs the *sikidy* ("divination") to discover what sort it is. There are three varieties, *andiha*, *andamalama* and *evobola*, which are the same in symptoms but differ in treatment. Apparently the real difference lies in the strength and obstinacy of the possessing spirit, but Raindratsaivo remarked cynically that rich people were usually possessed by the *andiha*, which required the longest and most expensive ceremony. 753 755

The cure of *salamanga andiha* is as follows: A bed in the form of a stretcher is hung from the roof of the house in such a position that its edge will be against the north side of the center post and its head east. Directly over the ordinary fireplace another fireplace is made. This is a platform raised on four posts about 2 feet high and covered with a mat. On the mat is a square enclosure of boards full of earth in which stone tripods for two pots are planted. One tripod 755

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755 787 The *salamanga menabe* is a form of possession by an ancestral spirit. The spirit speaks through the person possessed and prophesies coming misfortunes to the entire group such as pestilence, floods or the attack of an enemy. The *menabe* carries a staff with which he points out where bad *ody* ("charms") are hidden. During the seizure he is "like an *ombiasy*" ("medicine-man") but the state cannot be induced and he is not consulted regularly. A peculiarity of this form is that no one may wear a hat while the *menabe* is dancing. If he sees a person wearing one he tries to take it off and, failing in this, falls unconscious. He is revived by drinking and being asperged with water containing medicine.

158 828 The *salamanga sakalava* is rare and occurs only in the north. It is also due to possession by an ancestral spirit, but the possessed does not prophesy. The movements are the most violent of all and the victim vomits blood. This is caught and carefully kept, for if any of it falls on the ground the victim will die at once. Informants did not know the method of cure for this variety.